

CHAMPION DISPLAY BY SUPER WYCOMBE

SHOWING the experience of true champions, Wycombe Wanderers overcame a series of problems on Tuesday night to clinch a vital and thoroughly deserved victory over Staines Town in the Rothmans Isthmian League Division One.

Not only were Wanderers severely hit by injuries but they had to stave off an extremely physical challenge from the home side, who showed little of the form that has taken them from 15th to fourth place in the table. Staines were unbeaten in six matches on the trot before Tuesday but on this display, there seemed little to suggest they are possible champions.

For enthusiasm they couldn't be faulted but their niggling fouls and lack of attacking ideas let them down badly. One particular incident, when Peter Cruse committed a wicked foul on Paul Birdseye, climaxed a heated first half but thankfully, things simmered down after the interval.

It was then that Wanderers played their best football of the match. Keeping cool when under pressure, they gave Staines an object lesson in controlled, attacking football. This, and not over-physical football, is how to win titles.

It is difficult to select individuals from one of Wycombe's best performances of the season but special mention must be made of Keith Mead, Ray Eaton, Dave Bullock and Howard Kennedy. Mead and Eaton have both been below best recently but they gave everything at Staines and were truly superb. Bullock was deputising for flu-hit skipper John Delaney and hardly put a foot wrong while Kennedy had by far his best game of the season, running ceaselessly until the final whistle.

Wanderers must have been wary about this game for defeat, and to a lesser extent a draw,

Staines Town 0, Wycombe Wanderers 1

REPORT BY STUART EARP

would have seriously damaged their hopes of retaining the title. They faced probably the most informal side in the league and did so without goalkeeper John Maskell (injured), Delaney and Geoff Anthony. Peter Spittle took over in goal while Dave Alexander moved into midfield with Mick Holifield going up front. Dylan Evans was preferred to Bruce Macrae, who was made substitute.

Staines were soon showing evidence of their recent form when Peter Shaw went close at the far post. After four minutes John Ritchie flicked a throw-in to his striking partner Cruse and the latter's cunning lob landed on top of the net with Spittle struggling.

Tony Horseman and Terry Reardon both needed assistance from trainer Jock Sheppard as the game became hard but Cruse's foul on Birdseye was far worse than anything that had gone before. Earlier Cruse had been hit in the face when Birdseye went to clear a bouncing ball, for which he was penalised. In the 17th minute, Cruse and Birdseye went for another high ball. Cruse flicked it over the full back's head, turned and caught him a stunning

blow that felled Birdseye. After Birdseye had received treatment another clash flared up and this time both players were spoken to by referee Dave Smith who pointed to the changing rooms as a final warning. Thankfully, it was heeded.

To return to the game, Staines appeared to be weak in the centre of their defence where there is a marked lack of height. But Wycombe were unable to test them for any length of time and it was the home side that had the better chances. Martin Bax was put through by Arthur Rowlands after 25 minutes but his lob finished in the side netting. Four minutes later Spittle for once misjudged a corner and Shaw headed for goal only to see the admirable Mead clear off the line.

Wycombe's only real chance of the half came after 37 minutes with one of the best moves of the game. Horseman, in space, played the ball out to Alexander. He chipped through for Evans but the latter snatched at his shot which finished over the crossbar. The first time passing had Staines in real trouble.

Bax went into the referee's book for continual dissent after 40 minutes while Staines had one

final chance to break through but Rowlands just failed to get a touch to Ritchie's cross.

Wanderers had the strong wind in their favour for the second half which was only nine minutes old when Macrae replaced the struggling Horseman, who was playing with a strapped thigh after his first half injury. After Rob Williams had wasted a chance to score against his former colleagues by driving over the bar, Wycombe began to gain the initiative with some fast raids.

Thanks to Terry Reardon, Kennedy and Alexander, they held the whip hand in midfield and after Evans and Macrae had gone close in one move, Wanderers snatched the all important goal. Tom McCready had gone off injured and Staines had to reshuffle their defence to accommodate striker Tim Soutar. This, however, had little effect on the goal which came when Holifield pushed the ball through to Alexander. Evading a tackle from Soutar inside the box, 'Alex' fired in a shot which 'keeper Frank Parsons could only parry and Evans was there to hook home the loose ball.

While many teams would have brought all their players back to defend, Wycombe continued to attack the Staines side and retained the initiative until the final whistle by taking the game to their opponents.

Staines did hit back with two corners and one or two late attacks but it was here that Wycombe's experience stood them in good stead. A header from Ritchie in the 89th minute was well gathered by Spittle and with it went Staines' last hopes.

Wycombe deserve the highest praise for a victory against the odds and with performances like this, no one can rule them out of the championship race.

STAINES: F. Parsons; P. Shaw, R. Williams, T. McCready (sub T. Soutar 67 mins), B. O'Sullivan; W. Salkeld, M. Bax, P. Beasant; P. Cruse, J. Ritchie, A. Rowlands.

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle; P. Birdseye, D. Bullock, K. Mead, R. Eaton; D. Alexander, T. Reardon, H. Kennedy; D. Evans, A. Horseman (sub B. Macrae 54 mins), M. Holifield.

Referee: D. Smith (Hornchurch).
Half-time: 0-0. **Goalscorer:** Wycombe — Evans (69).
Official attendance: 1,300.